2:Sanders E-5 (no date) 1949 EE1 Bulgaria EE1

92

CHAPTER VI

MARRIAGE

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THE BULGARIAN groom settled down naturally into the role of the married man as the embarrassment of the first few days of good-natured joshing wore away. He took less and less interest in the Sunday afternoon promenade, preferring to sit in front of the tavern with the other married men where he liked to be complimented on the woman he had chosen in the same way that he would appreciate compliments on a cow just bought. However, as marriage progressed he began to respect his wife as a person rather than as a possession.

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It was when the first child arrived, in a year or so, that the husband suddenly felt a sense of tremendous importance. He was no longer just a married man; he was a father. Though the beginning of married life had little effect upon his behavior, the fact of parenthood changed even his facial expression, his earnestness in his work, and his whole attitude toward the future. I sensed this often in the requests that people made for photographs. Few young men came to ask for pictures of their brides; but many wanted pictures of their infants, especially of the sons. In the case of the first child they would hold him up squarely in front of the camera so that he would fill up the whole picture if possible. But as children continued to arrive year after year, the fathers often asked, "Could we get our new oxen into the picture too?"

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Most of the men accepted marriage as they did the weather: inevitable, sometimes balmy and sometimes disagreeable, but utterly essential. They did not go out of their way particularly to adjust themselves to marriage, and spoke little of marriage. They patiently waited for parenthood, which was revolutionary in its effect upon them

2: Sanders E-5 (no date) 1949 EE1 Bulgaria EE1

Epiphany the godparent went to the home of his godchild, poured water on him or, in a rare case, pushed him into the river for the sake of his health during the coming year. On Cheese Sunday, however, the godchild went to his godparent's home with a gift and begged forgiveness for all sins committed during the year. On certain other holidays and special occasions the godchild was also supposed to pay his respects. 608 527 857

Some features of this bond between godparent and godchild were strange to one unfamiliar with the Orthodox Church. Behavior in the presence of godparents was highly formalized and correct. A person would not lie to his godparent; nor was he supposed ever to swear in his godparent's presence. These customs emphasized the mystical spiritual union which was supposed to exist between godparent and godchild. 608

Because the office of the godparent was hereditary, the same family provided godparents for the members of another family for generations. Consequently a feeling of strong relationship had come about. A godparent was considered one of the closest of relatives. "The godfather is closer than an uncle, and the godmother is closer than an aunt," the peasants used to say. Children of the two families could not marry even though madly in love, because, in the sight of the village, they were related. The taboo against marriage into the family of the mother's godparents further complicated matters. A woman, upon marriage, adopted the godparent of her husband, who assumed the same responsibility to the children of that couple as he did to the father. If a godparent was called upon to officiate at a wedding or a christening and was unable to attend, he could send one of his children to perform in his stead. [582]

We have already seen the part that the godparents *(kumove)*[1] played in the wedding ceremony. The rite of christening revealed even more of the relationship between godparent and his spiritual ward. He went with a friend or relative to the infant's home, some two or three Sundays after its birth, and took it to the church. He had previously discussed the child's name with the parents and usually followed their wishes, but had the right to give the child any name he thought proper. In the case of the first son he was apt to follow the 608 553 851

[1] [See p 89, category 116 -- Analyst]

?:Sanders E-5 (no date) 1949 EE1 Bulgaria EE1

608 553 851

custom of giving him the "little name" of his paternal grandfather.

After the morning church service a small group of interested people would gather around the priest up near the front of the church. The priest, dressed in his richly decorated robes and with his long auburn hair uncovered, made an impressive figure. The sexton and a woman or two scurried around getting lukewarm water ready in a basin. The air of the room was heavy with the combined smell of incense, used in the church service, and melting tallow, as the tapers in the front candelabra sputtered toward exhaustion. Before they flickered out an attendant doused them in water and threw the stubs into a tin receptacle near the bowl of sand, in which worshipers had placed candles in memory of the dead.

After the layers of swaddling clothes had been removed from the infant the priest quieted the small group by saying: "Let us begin." While the godparent held the baby he listened to the solemn obligation which he was assuming, an obligation made more impressive by the use of scriptural passages and a charge by the priest. Levity quickly replaced any serious thoughts as the godfather jocularly affirmed three times that he "resigned" from the devil, and spat across the baby resoundingly onto the floor to signify that he would keep everything unholy from the child.

The high light of the church ceremony was the immersion of the tiny baby three times in warm water mixed with olive oil. As Father Sava had had ample experience with the three little girls of his own, he deftly balanced the child in palm and forearm while laving it three times in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Then the woman assisting the godfather, usually his wife, dressed the baby in an entirely new outfit. While this was taking place the priest was washing and drying his hands with a bar of soap and towel which the godparents provided and which they expected him to keep as a part of his fee.

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The infant's mother had remained at home[1] because her purification ceremony at the church could not take place until forty days after the child's birth. Of course, she was expected to help prepare the christening feast which followed the church ceremonies. The christening party invariably arrived at the home in a gay mood and stood around laughing as the godfather turned the child over to the mother

[1] [From the christening ceremony -- Analyst]

2; Sanders E-5 (no date) 1949 EEI Bulgaria EEI

with these words: "I took the child away a Jew and now I return him to you a Christian."

There was usually an awkward wait of half an hour or more until the meal was ready and the priest had come to give the blessing so the feasting could begin. The christening dinner was one of the most significant of all family events for both adults and children. A child could not attend school without a baptismal certificate, nor could he later join the army, get a passport, or do anything of real importance without this church record. For a child from an Orthodox home to be unchristened was worse than having him unnamed; he did not exist legally. The national government, however, honored the equivalent of these baptismal certificates given by religious minority groups for their members, and also considered valid their marriages and divorces, be they Moslems, Jews, or Protestants. This religious freedom and tolerance had been a source of pride to many a Bulgarian in the past.

There were times in Dragalevtsy, though rare indeed, when the two families involved felt it best to break off the godparent relationship. If a woman, for instance, had three or four miscarriages, the godparents, who officiated at the wedding, might say: "You're not having very good luck with your children. We've been talking it over, and believe that things would work out better for you if you had different godparents." The husband and wife could then invite another couple to be godparents.

There were a few instances where babies did not have godparents at birth. Former godparents for the family might have died, moved away, or been unwilling to serve. In such a case the baby, no matter what the weather happened to be, was left on a street corner near the church just prior to the Sunday morning service. Naturally, the cries of the child attracted the curiosity of some passer-by. At the moment that he went over to look at the baby some elderly woman rushed out of hiding to say: "Congratulations, sir. You have the honor of serving as godparent to this child." So off he was marched to the church, be he foreigner, gypsy, drunk, or on important government business, to participate as godfather in the christening. Should he move to some distant place, he was still expected to keep in touch with his unexpected charge and, if possible, return in due course of time to take part in the

2:Sanders E-5 (no date) 1949 EE1 Bulgaria EE1

608 553 851 godchild's wedding. This strange custom illustrated that where there is a *must*, such as *having* to have a godparent, there was a traditional method for correcting any irregularity.

658 871 Another *must* for the children, at least from the government point of view, was school attendance. The child began his formal education at seven years of age. In the "good old days" much ceremony attended this event. The peasants called the teacher *"Kandilo,"* a candle, the one to light the path for the child entrusted to him. As education became more common, the old ceremonies died out. All that remained of that old ceremonial respect was the handful of flowers the children sometimes gathered in the fields for a favorite teacher.

In Turkish times, only boys attended school. Educational activity in Dragalevtsy, however, took a new lease on life with the completion of the excellent building in 1931, made financially possible by the help of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of the Interior. The school consisted of four primary grades and three classes which were termed the "pro-gymnasium." Boys and girls were supposed to complete the pro-gymnasium, though they could drop out as soon as they reached their fifteenth year. The director was in charge of all of the school's activity, under the supervision of the school inspectors.

The diagram on the following page illustrates the educational hierarchy of the country.

Few decisions were left to the local school authorities, whose duties had become largely administrative, in the sense of observing the regulations handed down from above. As the school director said, "Everything is controlled from the *Inspection*, though the teachers have much freedom in the classroom." Even this freedom was supervised. At the conclusion of each class the teacher had to go to the office and list the work taken up that hour, the questions asked, and assignments made. The inspector made surprise inspections of the health situation, the records of the director, and, if he chose, of the lesson notebooks of the school children. The purpose of this inspection was to check up and control, not to supervise constructively.

The school was supported financially by the Dragalevtsy *Obshtina*, though the salaries of the eight teachers were paid by the national